

From: "eugene-lamb@nacdnet.org%inter2" <eugene-lamb@nacdnet.org>
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Email: eugene-lamb@nacdnet.org

FirstName: Eugene

LastName: Lamb

Address1: National Assoc of Conservation Districts

Address2: 509 Capitol Court NE

City: Washington

State: District of Columbia

zipcode: 20002

Question1:

Question2:

Question3:

Question4: On behalf of the nation's 3,000 conservation districts NACD is pleased to respond to your request for feedback on the questions posed relative to the 2007 Farm Bill. In particular, we will focus on questions four and five regarding conservation and environmental goals and enhancement of rural economic growth.

The achievement of conservation and environmental goals has become a keystone of US farm Policy over the past 20 years. The financial assistance programs of the conservation title?CRP, CSP, EQIP, FRLPP, GRP, WHIP and WRP?provide producers with much-needed monetary help to implement conservation practices that provide tangible environmental benefits to the American public, including cleaner water and air, healthier soil, open space and improved fish and wildlife habitat.

The expansion of these initiatives and enactment of the Conservation Security Program in the 2002 Farm Bill have afforded us the opportunity to achieve considerable progress in addressing agricultural natural resource needs. In order to build on that progress, conservation must continue to be a key component in the Farm Bill.

We recognize the need to exercise fiscal responsibility and accountability, but we also believe the Farm Bill conservation programs are a sound investment in the future?not only in our environmental future, but our economic future, as well. Sound natural resource management ensures that that we will have the clean water, productive lands and forests and other natural resources to sustain a robust agricultural economy, which will continue to fuel so many other components of our nation's economic sector.

Conservation itself is a business that supports America's rural economy. It requires labor, equipment and other inputs that help sustain rural development and growth. Conservation provides financial support to our farm sector while remaining consistent with our international obligations on fair trade and domestic support to agriculture.

Clean energy markets?promoted by the Farm Bill's energy title?can also help to bring jobs back to rural America, enhance our national security and promote farm conservation practices. Support for renewable fuels development and production for on- and off-farm energy should continue to be an important consideration for the 2007 Farm Bill.

Conservation financial assistance is an important component in achieving agricultural sustainability both economically and environmentally. However, technical assistance to help producers put complex conservation practices on the landscape is equally important. The NRCS presence at the field level and the technical assistance the agency and others such as conservation districts provide within the infrastructure setup by the agency are critical to the success of conservation in the US. The bottom line is that producers need quality technical assistance to maximize the

effectiveness of the financial assistance they receive. Even without financial help, many producers still rely on technical help to ensure that they are putting quality practices on the land. But it's the combination of the two that makes the US conservation delivery system efficient, effective and the envy of just about every other nation on the planet.

The 2002 Farm Bill authorized increases in conservation funding that by 2007 will be double those of the last decade. As opposed to conservation spending prior to 2002 in which the bulk of conservation spending was directed toward land retirement programs, about two-thirds of the new funds since 2002 target programs emphasizing conservation on working lands that are still used for crop production and grazing. According to USDA's Economic Research Service, conservation programs for working lands will rise from less than 15 percent of federal expenditures on agricultural conservation over the past 15 years to about half of the total conservation spending by 2007.

Conservation districts very much support the increased emphasis on conservation spending for private working lands and strongly encourage both the administration and the congress to continue that trend. We do support maintaining land retirement programs such as the CRP and WRP, but keeping our remaining cropland in production and funding conservation practices on that land may be a more cost-effective and environmentally viable option for existing working lands.

The 2002 Farm Bill was a hallmark for conservation in this country?it offers a sound mix of programs and resources to build upon for the future. While it heralded a tremendous leap forward, there are still many who remain untouched by its potential. Conservation districts believe that every acre counts from a conservation perspective and that the Farm Bill needs to bring its conservation benefits to all producers and all agricultural lands. It doesn't matter whether it's EQIP or CSP, WRP or CRP, on-the ground results are what counts and making sure we have the vehicles to get those results in 2007 will be the principal measure of our success.

It will be important in crafting the next Farm Bill that we step up our efforts to involve historically underserved producer groups such as specialty crop producers, tribes and others that have not seen the Farm Bill conservation programs as tools to help them.

As you have done so successfully with your forums held during the past months, through our recently established NACD Farm Bill Task Force we will, over the course of the next year, reach out to all of our conservation partners to ask for their recommendations on the next Farm Bill. We will share these recommendations with you, as well as those in Congress who will be involved in the reauthorization discussions.

Conservation districts look forward to working with our partners at USDA to continue the considerable progress we've made in addressing America's environmental and economic challenges. We appreciate the opportunity to provide you with our views.

Question5:

Question6: